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ON THE MEANING OF HISTORY

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ON THE MEANING OF HISTORY

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Dr. HERBERT HERRING

I

First of all my thanks go to the Syndicate of the University of Madras for having given me the honour of delivering this year's *Principal Miller Endowment Lectures.* — Since the institution of these lectures in 1926 (by the way, the year when I first appeared on the stage of this world) their title has never been changed: "The inner meaning of history as disclosing the one increasing purpose that runs through the ages". In all these years ever since so many excellent scholars from India and abroad — among them our highly respected Prof. T. M. P. Mahadevan, his learned colleagues Prof. P. Nagaraja Rao and Prof. Devasenapathi — have been dealing with this subject and tackled it in its various aspects and from so many different angles that one might be doubtful as to whether it would be possible to add something new to what had already been elaborated by my forerunners in this place. Your reaction at the end of these two lectures will show whether my attempt to do so has been a successful one.

I would like to start with some critical remarks on the title of these lectures itself which I consider as a challenge to me and my philosophical background, since it postulates the *a priori* supposition, that there is an overall purpose, a final goal, a one and only *Telos* in human history qua world history and that the meaning of this history is the disclosure of the gradual and increasing progress towards this final aim; whereby it is an open question whether this aim, this climax is to be found within the realm of history itself, as its ultimate point, so to speak, or whether it essentially transcends this realm. If this climax is to be found within the realm of history itself, then we would have to take the term "to disclose" in the sense of "to gain knowledge of something" and we would

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have to ask for the method and the concepts to be employed in order to find out about the range and limits of such a knowledge. But if this final aim essentially transcends the realm of history, then the term "to disclose" has to be taken as synonymous with "to reveal" and then our investigation would not be rooted in experience, could not be based on any scientific method and would rather amount to belief instead of knowledge.

In saying that the title of these lectures contains the *a priori* supposition just explained, we have to note that it is the very essence of any *a priori* proposition that it can neither be affirmed (verified) nor denied (falsified) by experience; it has, on the contrary, to be taken as a basic proposition in the original sense (and not in the somewhat misleading sense of logical positivism), namely as forming the basis for any other proposition on the same subject. As a well-known example I take Kant's basic proposition that the categories of our understanding are *a priori* forms of knowing the *a posteriori* or, in other words, that the subjective forms of knowing objects are at the same time the forms of the objects of knowledge themselves. But such a basic proposition can, of course, not be analysed by means of any *a posteriori* method; for otherwise we would commit ourselves to a *petitio principii* or run into a vicious circle; since a fundamental principle of knowledge cannot itself become an object of this very knowledge just as little as the first and final purpose, taken as the original and ultimate aim of all teleological investigation can itself be tackled by teleological means of investigation.

If we, therefore, would interpret the title of our lectures in the way of traditional metaphysics, i.e., deducing the whole structure of human history from some *a priori* basic propositions (and this has been, in fact, the line of investigation of most of the great outlines of a philosophy of history, from Hegel to Toynbee), we would have to refrain from all scientific argumentation and place ourselves in the realm of myth and religion — surrendering to surmise and prophecy — which, no doubt, could have a very edifying effect and be of great value for common life.

We prefer, nevertheless, to understand the theme of the Principal Miller Lectures not in this sense but in the sense of a

transcendental philosophy, and that means that we will not ask for the purpose and final goal of history as an object of our knowledge but for the categories, structural elements and principles of investigation that render a critical reflection on this problem possible. Whereas by this method and line of investigation a final goal of history cannot be discovered or even demonstrated, it can be shown in its distinct definition against historical phenomena and, perhaps, history itself, i.e., as a limiting concept of all human knowledge about the meaning of history.

Although in approaching the problem in such a way we also base our inquiries on the *a prior* supposition that there is a final purpose in history, we leave it for the moment an undecided question whether this purpose exists in some natural or supra-natural manifestation or whether it is imposed on history by the human mind. But however great the probability for the one or the other theory may be, we shall see at the end of our discourse — and here I anticipate already the outcome of our investigations — that in neither case we shall reach a clear-cut solution, that, on the contrary, the problem of the final purpose and goal of history will always be a perennial, unsolvable problem for the human mind, because man is himself an historical being and because there is no such standpoint or platform from which I could judge the historical process in its totality: It is thoroughly hidden in its origin and completely open into the future.

II

There have been, even in far remote times, reflections on the position of man in the universe and on earth; but these early considerations were mostly mythological in character. Thus we find in the first millennium before Christ, among the Presocratic philosophers, especially Heraclitus, some kind of man's awareness of being in a certain place and in a certain situation of the cosmic process, but this awareness is far from understanding man as an historical being. The great thinkers of ancient Greece, up to Socrates, Plato and even Aristotle, were not conscious of what we call world-history since they did not have the concept of history at all. Their main concern was the basic origin of everything being, the everlasting and unchangeable element or substance of all temporal appearances. They understood and interpreted the world process as a cyclus, as the continuous repetition of the same structures, patterns and forces, whereas the process itself was not to be understood in

the sense of a teleological progress. The following quotations from the writings of Chrysippus, a Stoic of the 3rd century B.C., show in which literal sense the term 'repetition' has to be understood:

> "Socrates and Plato will exist again and every man with his friends and his fellow citizens; he will suffer the same and do the same. Every city, every village and field will grow again. And this restoration will not happen once, but the same will return without limit and end."
>
> (Stoicorum veterum fragmenta, ed. H. v. Arnim, II, 190)

Thus the history of man was seen as part of the process of cosmogony, and it is in this context only and not in the context of a world-wide social and moral order that to the Greeks the concept of mankind, if at all, bears some relevance. The human being, with whom the early Greek thinker deals in what we nowadays would call anthropology and moral philosophy is not man as such nor mankind as a whole: it is the individual seen under the aspect of his being an active member of that distinct social order which the Greeks called *Polis* and by which was meant the community of people living together in the same district under the same laws and rules of social life. Only as a member of the *Polis* man is given the possibility of unfolding and developing all his natural potentialities; and it is because of this outlook on man that Aristotle characterizes the state as being prior to the individual, just as the whole is prior to its parts — prior, of course, not in the temporal sense but in the sense of being of greater value, of priority. It is a fatal but, nevertheless, very common misunderstanding of Aristotle's definition of man as *physei politikon zoon* — as a which the Greeks called *Polis* and by which was meant the community — to interpret this definition universally or metaphysically. His subject under discussion is the individual man living in a community of people similarly rooted in the same nature and culture. Aristotle's man under discussion is, strictly speaking, the civilized Greek — preferably the citizen of Athens — and neither the barbarian warrior of the West and North, nor the creature in lethargic tropical slumber of the South and the East.

It may be mentioned here in parenthesis that also Hinduism in its original form lacks any historical consciousness in the sense of a

continuous progress of mankind towards a final aim. The highest possible stage of perfection in man's life, that of *mokṣa,* can only be achieved by means of a radical spiritual training, by the individual's concentration on a transcendent power. *Mokṣa* can only be achieved — and here we see the fundamental difference from the ancient Greek outlook on life and world — through turning away from all social, even worldly objects and relations which as *avidya* or *māyā* mean a bondage to man. Only by this direction of the mind, rebirth is possible on a higher and purified stage of Being. This outlook on life and world comes close to the ideal of the Stoic sage whose main calling was the cultivation of his own virtue.

The first attempts to understand history from a teleological point of view take us back to the Prophets of the Old Testament, specially to Daniel, and to the teachings of Zoroaster in ancient Iran in the 7th and 6th centuries before Christ. It was about the same time when the early Presocratics were teaching in Greater Greece or Asia Minor respectively, when in India the Upanishads were composed and Aruna proposed the idea of the five ages of the world. On this early stage of a rather theological-mythological understanding of history Arnold J. Toynbee in his book "Civilization on Trial", London 1946, p. 14 f., comments as follows :

> "In the vision seen by the Prophets of Israel, Judah and Iran history is not a cyclic and not a mechanical process. It is the masterful and progressive execution, on the narrow stage of this world, of a divine plan which is revealed to us in this fragmentary glimpse, but which transcends our human powers of vision and understanding in every dimension."

Inspite of all these occasional attempts to interpret history in a systematic and teleological way, it was not until the rise of Christianity that 'the Historical' was given a distinct place and a specific dimension in the scheme of universal creation.

It was the early Christian who understood life as a constant progression from the darkness of the past into the pure, immaculate light of the future. History for him was the continuous and conscious striving of man and world in its totality after the final salvation by the Supreme Lord which finds its climax in the second coming of Jesus Christ for the Last Judgement on Dooms-

day. For the Christian, history is actually the period between the first and second coming of Christ, and human life on earth has to be seen as the preparation for the final salvation.

The most excellent representative of the early Christian's outlook on history is St. Paul, who holds the opinion that there is a general meaning of history but that this meaning is not immanent in history itself. It is not rooted in meaningful historical actions and events and can therefore not be discovered by any rational discourse. As Bultmann, himself a prominent representative of contemporary Protestant Theology, puts it:

> "The meaning is given by God to whose will the history of sin has the paradoxical meaning of being the relevant preparation for his (God's) grace."
>
> (R. Bultmann: "History and Eschatology," Edinburgh, 1957, p. 41).

With this eschatological idea another very important aspect comes into focus, namely the oecumenical aspect, i.e., the idea of mankind as the community of all — past, present and future — human beings who all will be saved by Jesus Christ. Thus the historical understanding which hitherto had been the understanding of the fate of a particular people has reached a universal dimension, the dimension of world-history. Wilhelm Windelband, in his great History of Philosophy ("Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie") explains this as follows.

> "Christianity found, from the very outset, the nature of the whole course of the world in the experiences of personalities; to it external nature was only the stage upon which the relation of person to person, and above all that of the finite spirit to the divinity was played. To that was added a further determinative principle: the principle of love, the consciousness of the solidarity of the human race, the deep conviction of universal sinfulness, and faith in a common redemption. All this led to the fact that the story of the Fall and of Redemption was regarded as the true metaphysical content of the world-reality, and that instead of an everlasting process of nature the drama of world history as a temporal course of freely

> willed activities became the content of the Christian metaphysics." (p. 212).

We have seen so far that the early reflections on history and its meaning were mainly part of the cosmogony, and in this context considerations on the origin of evil, either in the shape of sin or of metaphysical imperfection, were of considerable interest, especially to the thinkers of the Christian Middle Ages.

The idea that, in spite of all the obvious imperfections and moral evils with which we are confronted at any time and everywhere — or even because of them — this world is still the best of all possible worlds, and that the evil plays a distinct part in the creator's design of the universe, can already be found in Plato's "Timaios", his great dialogue on world-origin, wherein at the end, Timaios says:

> "This universe . . . is the — visible image of God himself who can only be approached by reason; it is the greatest and best, the most beautiful and most perfect, the one and only world."

This idea is of great importance in the metaphysics of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. For them the evil is not a *negatio* but a *privatio* of perfection; it is not the complete absence of perfection but a mere lack of perfection, just as blindness does not mean being without eyes but being unable to use one's eyes properly according to their natural purpose.

But if this be the case, why then did the creator, the absolute and highest perfection possible, not create a world without any imperfection? To that these thinkers provide us with a somewhat sophisticated answer: In his ultimate wisdom and goodness, the creator wanted man to participate to a certain extent in his creative power, and therefore he gave him a free will. But man is taken as the image of God and not as God himself, in other words he is a creature and not the creator, he is a finite being, and therefore limited in his rational and moral capacities, thus doomed to error and sin and therefore dependent on the final salvation by the all-embracing grace of the Absolute. This is also, by and large, the doctrine of Nicolaus Cusanus, the great theologian and philosopher of the 15th century.

Taking this into account, we gain a better understanding of the — at first sight extremely absurd — thesis that this our world with all its weaknesses and imperfections can yet be called the best of all possible ones.

This theory became widely known under the name of *theodicée* by the investigations of Leibniz according to whom all moral evils are rooted in the metaphysical one which consists in the finiteness and essential limitations of all worldly things.

Even Kant, in his pre-critical period before 1770, held the view that there was no better world possible than the one existing and that in this world everything was right and good. At the end of his small essay on optimism ("Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus", 1759) he writes:

> "I am, therefore, convinced — and perhaps some of my readers will share this opinion — and at the same time I am happy to recognize that I am a citizen of a world that could not have been better. Chosen by the best of all beings as a modest contribution . . . to the most perfect of all possible designs, I appreciate my Being all the more since I was privileged to hold a position in this best of all plans."

From these ideas of Leibniz and Kant a direct line of thought can be drawn to Schelling, to whom the evil is neither a simple *negatio* nor a *privatio* of cosmic harmony but disharmony in a positive sense, and to Hegel's theory of a dialectical world-progress from nature to culture, from man's unawareness of freedom to his full consciousness of the free will in its striving after a state of mankind which is based on reason and law. Thus Hegel writes in the concluding paragraph of his Lectures on the Philosophy of History ("Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte"):

> "That the history of the world, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is this process of development and the realisation of the Spirit — this is the true Theodicy, the justification of God in history."

Let us now consider some of the main traditional attempts to deal with history in a philosophical way. A philosophical investiga-

tion of history in the sense of inquiring into the specific rules, the particular categories and, in a final speculative culmination, of asking for the original and ultimate aim and the absolute meaning of this process of events is of comparatively recent origin. It is, in its systematic construction and development, an achievement of the socalled German Idealism, especially that of Hegel. Regardless of their disagreement in many details, we may say that the German Idealists proper, namely Fichte, Hegel and Schelling, understood philosophy of history as a search for a deeper, regular and even unchangeable meaning of the events of the world and world-process as such. Based on this main thought, they tried to build a well-established system of rules and laws which, taken to be just as firm and as reliable as the laws of nature, should make it possible to understand the process of history as a continuous reasonable progress from its first unspecified origins towards the manifestation of its final aim. The most sophisticated example of such a synoptical inquiry into the meaning of history is to be found in the works of Hegel. Since Hegel's philosophy of history and state can only be understood adequately in the context of his subtle system of metaphysical panlogism, a general outline of this system itself may prove helpful for our further considerations.

III

The all-creative world-substance, the principle that penetrates and moves the whole world is the Spirit which, as the sole original principle, is the very Absolute. To be world means to be Spirit, means to be *Logos*. It is for that reason that the doctrine of the Spirit that comes into the world, prevails and acts in it and brings about all those phenomena which we experience as natural and historical things and processes, is not called metaphysics by Hegel — as one should suppose — but the Theory of Logic, i.e. knowledge of the *Logos* as the principle of everything being. Because man, in his very nature, is but a part, one possible appearance of the Absolute Spirit among others — probably the most important and valuable one — every kind of human knowledge is a kind of self-consciousness of the *Logos*. It is from this point of view that Hegel's fundamental proposition should be understood — that the rational is the real and the real the rational: everything being is, as part of the *Logos*, logical, akin to the *Logos*, and only what is akin to the *Logos* is real.

We would like to note here that it is very difficult to find the equivalent English word for Hegel's term *Geist; spirit, mind soul*— these terms are rather labelled in their meaning by tradition. We have, nevertheless, decided to employ the term *spirit* where *Geist* is meant by Hegel. But for you Indians it could be made much clearer by referring to the Sanskrit term *atman*, and we might be permitted to say that what is really meant by the Hegelian term *Geist* comes nearest to what is meant by *atman* in the Upanishads. This would be in accordance with Max Müller's understanding of the term, for instance, when he writes in the preface to the first volume of his admirable edition of "The Sacred Books of the East", p.XXX:

> "It (atman) was to them (the Brahmans) what in other systems of philosophy has been called by various names, *To On, the Divine, the Absolute.* The highest aim of all thought and study with the Brahman of the Upanishads was to recognise his own self as a mere limited reflection of the Highest Self, to know his Self in the Highest Self and through that knowledge to return to it, and regain his identity with it. Here to know was to be, to know the Atman was to be the Atman . . .
>
> That Highest Self which had become to the ancient Brahmans the goal of all their mental efforts, was looked upon at the same time as the starting point of all phenomenal existence, the root of the world, the only thing that could truly be said to be, to be real and true."

This Absolute, the Spirit as *Logos,* is neither pure Being nor the opposite of it, namely Nothing; Being and Not-Being are "aufgehoben", as Hegel says, in a higher synthesis, and this German term "aufheben" has the threefold meaning of "to pick up" or "to elevate", " to conserve" and "to dissolve". Thus the contradiction between the Being and the Not-Being is elevated, conserved and finally dissolved in a higher synthesis. It is in these three steps of the dialectic movement that everything that occurs within the world develops, the occurrences being destined by the Absolute Spirit. In this dialectic process of position (*thesis*), opposition (*antithesis*) and the solution of the opposites in a higher *synthesis,* the *Logos* undergoes various stages: the stages of perception, understanding, reason, morality and religion, at the end of which process it returns to itself,

to the absolute knowledge as the self-consciousness of the Absolute Spirit. Thus the history of the world is but the gradual development of the self-consciousness of the Spirit in time. With regard to this Hegel states in the beginning of his Lectures on the Philosophy of History:

> " The only thought which philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of history is the simple thought of reason, that reason rules the world and consequently that world history too is a rational process."

According to the triad of this dialectic model, the field of knowledge is divided into the following sections :

1. Logic
2. Philosophy of Nature
3. Philosophy of Spirit

The Logic consists of

(a) The doctrine of being
(b) The doctrine of essence
(c) The doctrine of concept (this is, by the way, what we normally mean when using the term *logic* in philosophy.)

The Philosophy of Nature consists of

(a) Mechanics
(b) Physics
(c) Organics

The Philosophy of Spirit finally is divided into

(a) The doctrine of the subjective spirit (comprehending anthropology, phenomenology and psychology)

(b) The doctrine of the objective spirit (comprehending right, morals and morality)

(c) The doctrine of the absolute spirit (comprehending arts, religion and philosophy)

Now, the dialectic pattern is to be seen in the fact that either of the first two grades is synthetically implied and dissolved in the third one. To give but an example: Nature is, according to Hegel, "spirit,

alienated from itself." Thus Logic and Philosophy of Nature are, as opposites, dissolved in the higher synthesis of the Philosophy of Spirit.

We are in these lectures mainly interested in Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit, particularly in his doctrine of the Objective Spirit. Here, too, the metaphysical model of *thesis — antithesis — synthesis* reveals itself in the fact that the doctrines of right and morals are dissolved (elevated, conserved) in the doctrine of morality, for morality, as Hegel defines it, is nothing but morals based upon law And this definition forms the basis of his philosophy of state which, for our present purposes, need not be investigated in detail. It is sufficient to note that Hegel sees world-history as an "educational process from the arbitrariness of the natural towards a general will and subjective freedom", the highest form of which only being realized in the state as "the spiritual individual, the nation, in so far as it is organized, an organic whole" (Philosophy of History, p. 93). The state is, according to Hegel, the "kingdom of realized freedom", is "moral reality knowing itself", is the realization of freedom throughout the historical life of the nations. At this stage we have to reflect for a moment on the particular concept of freedom that is appropriate to these definitions.

Hegel's concept of freedom is — like that of the German Idealists in general — rather a positive than a negative one. Freedom does not at all mean lawlessness, and to be free does not mean to be independent of all moral ties. The true essence of freedom does not manifest itself in committing or omitting what one is pleased to do: this would be licentiousness and arbitrariness. Freedom in the positive sense is rather the capacity and the right to comply with the law, to obey the demanding challenge of the law. As Charles Kingsley says "There are two freedoms — the false, where a man is free to do what he likes; the true, where he is free to do what he ought." The slave obeys simply because there is a master whose whip he is afraid of. The free man obeys for it is only through his free decision to obey that he becomes aware of himself as a moral being. This concept of freedom can, in Hegel's opinion, only be realized within the "reasonable state". When the state, as Hegel says, "constitutes a community of existence, when the subjective will of man submits to law, the contradiction between liberty and necessity disappears."

If we now ask for the absolute aim of the world, Hegel answers this question thus: The absolute and final aim of the world is the realization of the Spirit (Logos) whose substance or essence is freedom. Freedom, however, is "self-contained existence" (Bei-sich-selbst-Sein) of the Spirit, its self-consciousness, the consciousness of its creative power or spontaneity. The absolute aim of the world is, therefore, the realization of freedom. World history is the progress of the Spirit in time, with a total awareness of its freedom. This Spirit which reveals itself in history as the gradually increasing rule of reason, is not some transcendent power outside history but is immanent within the historical development as its universal principle. Thus Hegel says already in the Introduction to his Lectures on the Philosophy of History:

> " The history of the world is none other than the development of the consciousness of Spirit. This result it is, at which the process of the world-history has been continually aiming, and to which the sacrifices that have ever and anon been laid on the vast altar of the earth, through the long lapse of ages, have been offered. This is the only aim which sees itself realized and fulfilled, the only pole of repose amid the ceaseless change of events and conditions, and the sole sufficient principle that prevents them. This final aim is God's purpose with the world . . ."

For Hegel, Spirit is meaningless unless it is one and universal, from which it follows that history is the manifestation of a sole and unique rational world-order, the unconscious instruments, the chosen vehicles of which being the individuals and the nations.

We have dealt with Hegel's philosophy of history at some length for good reasons; for it can be taken as one of the most significant examples for any dogmatic treatment of history — whereby it is of minor importance whether this is done from an idealistic, a materialistic or a naturalistic point of view. Let us consider briefly some other exemplary theories of history, first the materialistic interpretation of history by Karl Marx and his orthodox followers. Marx developed his theory of history by criticizing Hegel's system of dialectic Idealism: he set right what Hegel, in his opinion, had turned upside down. ("Das Kapital", 2nd ed., Preface).

For Marx, unlike Hegel, dialectic is important — not because it answers to the nature of thoughts but because it answers to the nature of things — because *it is,* as he sees it, the nature of things. Marx is not only interested in understanding history theoretically; his main concern is the shaping of history by means of analyzing and applying its immanent basic principles.

> "My own dialectical method", thus he writes in the Preface to the second edition of Das Kapital, "is not only fundamentally different from the Hegelian dialectical method but its diect opposite. For Hegel, the thought process . . . is the demiurge of the real; and for him the real is only the outward manifestation of the Idea. In my view, on the other hand, the ideal is nothing other than the material when it has been transposed and translated inside the human mind."

Like Hegel, Marx deduces the historical process from a few basic principles which are taken as absolute, the only but very significant difference being that for Hegel these basic principles were spiritual ones whereas Marx defines them as economic and social principles. The exemplary description of this so-called economic or materialistic interpretation of history is given by Marx in the Preface to his "Kritik der politischen ökonomie" (Critique of Political Economy), 1859, wherein he writes:

> "In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society — the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures are built up and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence which determines their consciousness."

This is the proper meaning of the so-called substructure-superstructure (Unterbau-Überbau) theory which, in short, states the following: all cultural activities and results of an age, of a particular society are but the outcome of the prevailing economic conditions and forces; and this is meant in the rigid sense of a causal relation, similar to the irreversible process of cause and effect in nature. Individuals as well as nations are what they produce and how they produce it, they are primarily determined by their means and modes of production. To change the prevailing unsatisfactory and inhuman modes and conditions of production and thereby of property completely by replacing the traditional capitalistic system (*thesis*) through the temporary dictatorship of the proletarians, the have-nots (*antithesis*), thus striving powerfully towards the final goal of the history of mankind, namely the abandoning of the continuous process of class-struggle and the establishment of a classless communist society of freedom and equality (*synthesis*) — this was the utopian aim of Karl Marx. This materialistic conception of history has been formulated very clearly by Friedrich Engels, Marx's powerful collaborator, in the Preface to the English edition of the "Communist Manifesto", 1888:

> "The 'Manifesto', being our joint production, I consider myself bound to state that the fundamental proposition, which forms its nucleus, belongs to Marx. That proposition is: that in every historical epoch the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange and the social organization necessarily following from it form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind . . . has been a history of class-struggles, a contest between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; that the history of these class-struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class — the proletariat — cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class — the bourgeoisie — without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class-distinction and class-struggles."

So the eschatological hope, the final stage of redemption will be the classless society, and this classless society will be brought about for all mankind by the international proletariat which, so to speak, plays the part of the saviour, the Messiah.

Let us now quickly glance over two philosophical interpretations of history which have also exercised a remarkable influence on western thinking. Oswald Spengler's "Der Untergang des Abendlandes" (The Decline of the West) appeared between 1918 and 1922, and the disastrous events of the First World War and its aftermath have, no doubt, been determining factors of his concept of history. Basing his main ideas upon Giambattista Vico's natural history of humanity which the Italian thinker developed in his book of 1725 "Principi di Scienza Nuova d' intorno alla comune Natura delle Nazioni" (Principles of a New Science on the Common Nature of the Peoples), Spengler intends to show those philosophical principles by means of which history could be interpreted completely not only in its past events but also in its future events which are likely to happen according to the ruling principle of analogy. Spengler tries to analyze the organic structure of the historical process by comparing present situations to analoguous events in the past and by linking up *per analogiam* present situations to possible events in the future. "Cultures are organisms; world-history is their collective biography." (op. cit. I, p. 141); this is the basic idea of his *Morphology of World-History* (the subtitle of his book), and like organisms, like plants and living beings, cultures originate, grow and flourish, decline and die. There is no continuous progress in world-history; history is no unity characterized by a gradual improving, striving after a particular final goal. The whole of history falls into cycles, into a merely temporal sequence of single civilizations which have their own specific character and are therefore closed in themselves, essentially independent of others.

Now, it seems to us that Arnold J. Toynbee's understanding and interpretation of history, as revealed by the many volumes of his work "A Study of History", 1934 ff., has to be grouped with Spengler's outlook on history. Toynbee agrees with Spengler in saying that a comparison of the ancient cultures with our present-day cultures enables us to gain an essential insight into our situation. But such a comparison becomes possible only on the basis of a clear cut distinction between the fate and the character of cultures, a distinction

which is missing in Spengler. While the characters of cultures, similar to the characters of individuals, are unique and incomparable, their fates are not; they are, similar to organic processes and the fates in the lives of men, comparable with one another. By means of this comparative interpretation of history which is based on a subtle study of a large number of historical facts, Toynbee strives after a typology of basic human behaviour in the face of similar, analogous situations. In investigating the great cultures of the past, he tries to discover general principles of the historical process which could serve as an illustration and even a demonstration of human history in its periods of growth, highest perfection and decay. Approaching the history of mankind from that angle, we shall find that it turns out as being determined by a dialectic struggle, an antagonism between race and environment, mind and nature. Every culture is, according to Toynbee, the mind's response to a challenge by natural conditions; thus challenge and response form the two basic poles of history.

IV

In the first lecture we have given an outline of some of the main traditional aspects in the philosophy of history — the idealistic system of Hegel, the materialistic system of Marx, the naturalistic interpretations by Spengler and Toynbee — which we took as representative of many others. What they all have in common, in spite of their considerable differences and even incompatibilities in many details, is that they all start off from some basic *a priori* principles, from an *a priori* pattern into which historical events and the historical process at large was made to fit as clay into a mould. But can such an interpretation of history do justice to the particular quality and character of historical events? Is it at all possible to interpret and logically determine history as a whole in such a *tour de force?* Does not, on the contrary, any such interpretation of universal history, an interpretation in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified, systematized and directed towards an ultimate meaning, come very close to fiction and prophecy, thus lacking any scientific bearing? History is, indeed, as Karl Jaspers has so convincingly pointed out in his enlightening book "Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte" (On the Origin and Final Aim of History), 1949, open to the past and into the future. Origin and final aim cannot be interpreted along the lines and by means of scientific experience and

rational discourse; they can only be presupposed or predicted. But all those presuppositions and predictions are far from being solid poles of a philosophy of history. Any attempt to draw conclusions from a presupposed origin or a fictitious anticipation of some ultimate aim is necessarily doomed to fail, because history is not a closed system; there is no standpoint outside the realm of history, since we ourselves are historical, are part of the process which we take such pains to understand, to schematize, to interpret scientifically as if it were a fixed system of rules and laws. Every attempt, therefore, to interpret history as such scientifically will prove itself at the end as unscientific or, at the worst, as nonsensical.

In this lecture we shall try to develop our own ideas on a critical ontology of history. The relation between such a critical analysis of the factual conditions and epistemological presuppositions of historical knowledge on the one hand and a speculative philosophy of history on the other is almost the same as the relation between Kant's critical philosophy and dogmatic metaphysics.

What I want to call a critical ontology of history has to be carried out in the analytical way of a transcendental philosophy, and as I have already mentioned in the beginning of my first lecture, I use the term *transcendental* in the Kantian sense, meaning that I call an inquiry transcendental if it is not primarily concerned with objects of knowledge but with those subjective forms of the mind which render all scientific knowledge of objects possible. Thus our main task will be to inquire into the specific categories suitable for analyzing the historical and to define these categories with regard to their realm of application.

In doing so, we should first come to an agreement as to what we want to call the realm of history proper. When using the term "history" in the context of these lectures, I mean — as you will have noticed already — history of mankind which concerns what happens through man's decisions and deeds in the world and to the world. As Emil Brunner, the great Swiss theologian, has put it in his remarkable book "Der Mensch im Widerspruch" (Man in Revolt), 1937 (quotations from the English edition 1957):

> "History is made where decisions are made. It is decisions which give the character of uniqueness and unrepeatableness to the historical in contradistinction from the happenings of nature. Decision separates the historical element from that rhythmical, cyclic process of

> nature ever returning to itself, where nothing really happens, because the end always returns to the beginning." (p. 440) "The history of man is embedded in a natural process which is not itself historical in character." (p. 454)

We should also agree that, when speaking of history, we mean world-history in the sense of world historical events and processes and not in the sense of an historical treatment of political, social, economic or cultural happenings and actions on the narrow scale of their purely or mostly local or national relevance. It is true, indeed, that all historical events happen at first in a certain place and at a certain time; but they become world-historical events only in so far as they transcend this particular place and time towards a larger scale. Further, we have to make it very clear that world-history is only part of that universal process which, most suitably characterized by the Greek term *cosmos,* comprises the totality of everything being, actual and possible, in its manifold manifestations. Thus world-history means not history of all cosmic phenomena but the realm of human decisions and actions in their supraindividual, supranational, global range and significance.

So, in order to define the historical from the natural, we have to investigate such typical human manifestations which show man, on the one hand, belonging to the realm of nature with its determining principles of causality, but, on the other hand, in his transcending this realm into the sphere of freedom or self-determination. This transcendence of the realm of nature takes place essentially through the acts of reflection and the consequent acts of decision for action; hence the question arises as to when, how and to which extent something is transformed from a mere happening in time into an historical event. To give an example: I spend my holidays at the beach of Rimini in the North of Italy. One pleasant morning I decide to go for an early walk, and on that walk I feel like crossing the river Rubicon. Now, this casual happening could surely not be called an historical event; but Caesar's crossing of that river in the year 49 B.C. is generally regarded as an historical event, and a very important one too. So we have to look for the conditions, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, which make a casual happening an historical event. Is the crossing of the Rubicon as such an historical event? Certainly not. What, then,

can make it an historical event? It seems that it is some kind of a subjective choice of judgement, based on principles of selection and evaluation, a choice which can either be made by contemporaries or by future generations or by both of them; and this selective evaluation can take place from different points of view, thus — just to mention the most familiar ones — from the point of view of cultural history or from that of political and social history or from the point of view of its relevance for the history of economics. There are cases where a happening may be called an historical event from all these points of view as, for instance, the publication of Marx'/Engels' "Communist Manifesto" in 1849, or the causes and the outcome of World War II. There are other cases where happenings in time might be called historical events only under one of these selective aspects, as the murder of President Kennedy which has to be judged only from the point of view of political history, or the first heart transplantation which definitely belongs to cultural history, the history of thought, and has certainly nothing to do with the political or economic evaluation of history.

When we said that the historical character of an event depends very much, if not exclusively, on the selective evaluation of others (not necessarily historians), this comes close to what Arthur C. Danto writes in his book "Analytical Philosophy of History", New York 1965, on the verifiability of statements about the past. As a plausible example he mentions Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoux as witnessed by his brother:

> "Historians might say", so he writes, "that when he climbed Mount Ventoux, he opened the Renaissance. But his brother could not have witnessed Petrarch opening the Renaissance. He could hardly have seen the event under that description, not because his senses were defective, but because he could not have understood the description at that time. Not unless he knew what was going to happen in the future, and knew, in addition, what historians were later going to say was the significance of what he saw . . ." (p. 59).

And the Argentinian Alejandro Korn writes about this element which we call selective evaluation, that many children have been born on the 15th of August 1769, but that historians have

only been interested in the one who was named Napoleon Buonaparte. ("Sistema filosófico" Buenos Aires 1959, p. 59).

But this principle of selective evaluation need not only be based on subjective reasons; it can also be dependent on objective ones such as, for example, the complete lack of documents and witnesses. On this important aspect Alfred Stern comments in his study "Geschichtsphilosophie und Wertproblem" (Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values), München/Basel 1967, p. 34 f.:

> " Assuming that a great writer, scholar or an otherwise creative person had nothing published of his work (...) and that he had destroyed everything before his death; and assuming, furthermore, that he — unlike Socrates — would have led an hermit's life so that there was no contemporary report on him whatsoever. With those suppositions made, he would have no historical existence, even if he had been a genius, since there would be no trace of him in the res publica."

It has been proved even for the natural sciences, especially by Einstein's and Heisenberg's subtle investigations, that in any process of knowing it is impossible to separate the observer from the thing observed, a fact which C. F. v. Weizsäcker, one of Heisenberg's disciples and himself a scholar of international standing, describes as follows:

> " Is reality ... to depend on our discretion? Not reality but the image through which we comprehend it. We cannot learn anything about the atom except by experiment. But to experiment means to violate nature. We force the atom ... to inform us in a suitable language about its properties. It is not really the space-time view which breaks down here...Nor is there a failure of the causality principle ... What in fact fails is the integration of these isolated fragments of observation and causality into an objective model of the process: a failure of our ability to objectify nature." (of Germany, Cultural Developments since 1945, München 1971, p. 41)

Heisenberg has shown, in his particular development of the Quantum Mechanics, that with regard to the traditional question of what matter really is we cannot give any satisfactory answer; thus, for instance, we cannot decide whether the atom is a particle or a wave. What we are permitted to say is that the atom appears to us, manifests itself either as a particle or as a wave, dependent wholly on the particular experimental arrangements made by man. We cannot abstract from the ontological subject-object relation. (cf. " Physik and Philosophie ", Berlin 1961).

If this is so even in the natural sciences which are based on experience and experiment, it is certainly the case in the field of history where there is no solid matter, the actions and reactions of which are explainable by the laws of causality, where there are the thoughts and deeds of man which cannot simply be interpreted along the lines of cause and effect. Thus it is clear that Maurice Mandelbaum's statement in "The Problem of Historical Knowledge ", New York 1938, p. 190—that historical knowledge is independent of subiective points of view and evaluations — is certainly not true. This may, perhaps, be true for history itself, but surely not for our knowledge of history. We think, on the contrary, that Leibniz is absolutely right in stating (admittedly in a context entirely different from ours) that the one and the same city, observed from different standpoints, appears in many different aspects and that, according to the unlimited number of simple substances or monads, there is an unlimited number of worlds which, however, are nothing but the different aspects of the one and only world existing, viewed from the different points of view of every monad. ("Monadologie", § 57). Now, if we substitute the term city with historical event, the term simple subtance or monad with investigator or observer and the term world with world-history, then, in following the line of Leibniz's argumentations, we might be permitted to say that the same historical event cannot be observed by two different persons from the same standpoint at the same time. It can, of course, be observed by different persons from the same standpoint, but not at the same time, and it can be observed by them at the same time, but surely not from the same standpoint. In both cases the historical event observed by different people is not exactly the

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same event: in the first case it is observed at different times, in the second case from different standpoints — in both cases its character changes due to the interference of different observers and the difference in the observers. And thus we gain a number of different interpretations of world-history which are, nevertheless, only aspects of the one and only history in its objective process. This example marks clearly the problem of subjectivity in all human knowledge which, with regard to history, we have called the problem of selective evaluation.

If we were to define, and so we did, world-history as the realm of human actions and decisions, then it could seem very plausible to say that it has neither a substantial meaning nor an overall purpose in itself and that meaning and purpose are given to it by man, by his actions and decisions only. And if we were to say, and so we did, that a happening in time becomes an historical event by some kind of a subjective choice of judging, based on certain principles of selection and evaluation, this could mean that we would have to subscribe to Theodor Lessing's well-known doctrine that history is nothing but imposing a certain meaning upon the as such meaningless, a doctrine which Goethe had already anticipated when he made Faust say ("Faust", Part I, Scene 1):

> "What you the spirit of the ages call
> is nothing but the spirit of you all,
> wherein the ages are reflected."

In our times, Karl Popper expresses this conviction thus:

> "Although history has no ends, we can impose these ends of ours upon it; and although history has no meaning, we can give it meanings." ("Has History Any Meaning?" p 310).

We shall look into these important questions a little later. Let us first pay some attention to three terms which have to be investigated in order to give a somewhat satisfactory answer to the

question whether history has any meaning in itself and whether the whole process of particular events is directed towards a final aim. These terms are: *Historicity, Historical* and *History*.

As to the term Historicity, there is — as I think — no subtle reflection necessary in order to realize that historicity in the sense of 'being or being possible in principle to become an historical event' is not identical with 'being in time'. While every historical event must happen at a certain time, and even in a certain place, not every happening in time can become an historical event; e.g., my thinking of my mother during breakfast this morning is surely not an historical event and will surely never become one.

While being in time is a necessary ontical or ontological condition for any historical event, being an historical event is certainly not a necessary condition for being in time.

Historicity as 'being possible in principle to become an historical event' obtains the character of 'being historical' if this possibility is (a) actualized in time, and (b) realized, acknowledged by others from a certain point of view. To cite once more the example of Caesar's crossing the Rubicon: the crossing as such was surely not historical, it became, however, historical by its interpretation as the beginning of the *Imperium Romanum* with its determining influence on world-history.

And what is meant by History? History is the sum total of all actual and possible historical events. In the understanding of the historian, history is only what has happened in the past and, out of that, what is worthwhile to be remembered. History in the understanding of the philosopher means the realm of these happenings which are ontically qualified in that they have happened, happen or could happen in the future as historical events.

From these basic categories and their careful analysis, we would have to proceed to more detailed ones, the investigations of which would, of course, by far go beyond the time limit of these lectures; but it should at least be mentioned that we would have to inquire into the proper meaning of the terms "rule", "law" and "principle" in nature and in history and hence in the sciences and the arts, and we would have to show that the phenomenon of an

extreme regularity in social life — which is, admittedly, sometimes striking (as, for example, the phenomenon of class struggle) — cannot be identified with historical necessity; for there is no criterion whatsoever, to prove that what has happened hitherto in many or even all the cases must only have happened as it happened and could not have happened otherwise. Furthermore, we would have to ask for inner and outer determination of actions, their autonomy and heteronomy, contingency and necessity, relating and non-relating to other people. As to the meaning of the term "relating" and "non-relating" in the context of history, I think that Emil Brunner is right in saying (with reference to Kierkegaard's dealing with this problem in "The Concept of Dread") that the individual as individual has no history; that history consists in the fact that my individual existence is interwoven with, related to other individuals' existence (Man in Revolt, p. 443). We would have to find out also about the meaning of the term "teleology" in nature and in history, and it is not at all as ridiculous as it may seem to raise the question whether and to what extent human thoughts, volitions and deeds may be dependent on a certain, basic or acute, organo-psychic disposition. Nietzsche's satirical remark that some philosophical systems originate mainly from a disturbed digestion of their authors may be considered from this point of view.

In all the cases just mentioned man has been referred to as an individual. At another level and realizing as we have done, that the concept of history makes no sense when restricted to individual life only, we would have to deal with man as belonging to some kind of a human community, and while examining this problem we would have to reflect on the phenomenon of race and on the question as to which extent climate and other natural conditions play a part in history. And, finally, we would have to analyze the meaning of the concepts of "right" and "morality" in any form of a human community.

In pursuing these investigations, it could only be helpful to keep in touch with other disciplines of knowledge, such as sociology, ethnology, psychology, biology (especially genetics), zoology (especially ethology) and others. In the case of the latter (ethology), for instance, we may be confronted with very enlightening and surprising results. Take, for example, the much disputed phenomenon of war in the course of history and the fates of the peoples.

Taking for granted that animals (and man, in his basic structure, is after all an animal) are mainly determined by their instincts, the four main ones being the urge for food, the urge to escape, sexuality and aggression, a sound research, as has been carried out in recent years by some ethologists (Lorenz, Portmann and others) could throw new light upon the phenomenon of war in human life, by investigating its natural biological roots. As Adolf Portmann, the Swiss zoologist, writes :

> "The study of animal instincts draws our attention to basic elements which are also effective in us. To place them in the specific mental and spiritual order of man, is our permanent task." (" Alles fliesst. Wege des Lebendigen ", Herder, Freiburg 1967, p. 88).

All such investigations and reflections, however, make sense only if we presuppose that man's basic nature, his essential structure, has always been the same and will always remain the same in its principles and operations. If this were not generally acknowledged, a great deal of what we call philosophy and science would be shaken at its roots. Thus there could be no discussion of the universal validity of basic moral values or fundamental principles of the bivalent logic (which, by the way, have not been proved false but only insufficient by the modern systems of polyvalent logics) ; and inquiries into the structure of history, its epistemological, axiological or even metaphysical principles would be completely senseless if we had to acknowledge the doctrine of historical relativism or historism as formulated, for instance, by Ortega y Gasset (Works, Madrid 1952, Vol. VI, p. 181) — that man has no nature but history and that his modes of being are simply innumerable : at any given time and place he is different from what he has been in the past and what he will be in the future. Surely, this is meant mainly with reference to human actions, their reasons and motives, since even Ortega would probably not have denied that the need for eating and drinking was, basically, the same at the time of Hammurabi as today.

It makes, nevertheless, some sense to ask whether human
for future generations. Could we not imagine that through some
kind of catastrophe a certain part of mankind might lose the func-
all our knowledge so far would prove itself absolutely meaningless
tioning of the cerebrum or that the neutralization and final loss of
nature could not possibly undergo such a fundamental change that

the cerebrum might be the result of man's further evolution? Admitting that this is, if at all, not likely to happen within the next 10,000 or 20,000 years, yet the general possibility of its happening cannot be excluded. If this would happen all previous human thoughts and actions, even the latest advances in the natural sciences and in technology, would appear from this point of view as fossilized documents of a strange species of living beings.

There seem other possibilities more likely to be realizable in a few generations, namely the manipulation of man by means of genetical procedures and operations. Prof. Joshua Lederberg, Nobelprize winner and Head of the Department of Genetics at Stanford University/California, has predicted a revolutionary evolution of mankind at the famous Ciba-Symposium on "Man and His Future", held at London in 1962. At this symposium he predicted that sooner or later by means of what is called "genetic engineering" it would be possible, for instance, to regulate the size of an individual's brain already in the embryonic stage. In his opinion we would soon be able, through genetic manipulations of chromosomes, homozygosis (making two genes homogeneous), gametic selection (selection of the germ cells) and the further development of experimental zytology (research into the specific characteristics of the cells), to breed a completely new species of man whose emotions, thoughts and actions would probably have very little in common with those of the homo sapiens.—Lederberg repeated these alarming predictions only a week ago, on September, 1st, at the Roche-Symposium in Basel. Asked whether such a manipulation of man would be morally justifiable, he answered laconically: "We biologists are no experts in ethics."—We know that the discipline of genetic engineering has already been established in recent years, especially by your Indian compatriot and Nobelprize winner Dr. M. G. Khorana and his research team in the United States.

We have to wait and see whether these or other alterations of man's basic structure will come true, and if so we will certainly have to take them into our reckoning.

But for the time being let us not ourselves behave like a fortune-teller trying to predict the future and let us return to our reflections on the meaning of history as the history of mankind in its common manifestations.

I think we have shown sufficiently that the main traditional theories of history set out to prove a unique and increasing purpose that runs through the ages, manifesting itself in the progression of mankind towards a final aim; this holds good for the idealistic systems as well as for the materialistic interpretations; and as far as the religious theories of history are concerned, this proof is not obtained by any process of reasoning but by the firm conviction that the history of mankind has to be seen as part of the universal process of revelation and salvation. For all these interpretations this progress in history is completely independent of the human mind. It is for Hegel the manifestation of the Absolute Spirit in its temporal objectivations whose humble instruments the human minds are — which carry out, so to speak, the orders of the Absolute Spirit on this battle-field of reason, be it as high-ranked officers or simple soldiers. The Marxist view of the historical progress as independent of the human mind is best formulated in our times by Georg Lukacs (who passed away just a few weeks ago) in his book "Die Zerstörung der Vernunft" (The Destruction of Reason), 1954, wherein he writes:

> "The social determination of the contents and forms of reason do not imply an historical relativism. The progressiveness of every situation or tendency of development is, in all the socio-historical conditionings of these contents and forms, something objective, and effective independent of the human mind." (p. 7).

To this Alfred Stern remarks:

> "I must confess that I cannot imagine any objective progress, independent of the human mind; for in order to establish and to measure any progress, one has to introduce a system of values, a normative scale which always presupposes the human mind. If this were not the case, one would have to assume that nature and society as such proceed gradually towards a higher level of values . . . This is, indeed, tacitly presupposed by Marxists. But this would only be possible on the basis of a teleological metaphysics which itself is incompatible with the scientific world-view held by Dialectic Materialism." (op. cit. p. 201).

May be there is objective progress in history; may be there is an objective purpose and a final goal. We do not doubt that there might be. What we doubt and even deny is our possibility of proving scientifically such a purpose and final goal and their meaning for mankind. We deny their provability, but we do not deny their possible existence. If we cannot prove them, we cannot deny them either; for, what cannot be verified can just as little be falsified. Thus, and this is our answer to Theodor Lessing as well as to Karl Popper, if we cannot see any meaning in history, this does not prove that there is none; it shows only our inability to prove such a meaning, due to the limitations of our knowledge which again is due to the limitations, the finiteness of man as such.

The errors and fallacies of all dogmatic theories of history do not so much consist in what they state and affirm as in their wrong pre-suppositions and assumptions, in their taking *a priori* for granted that there is a purpose and a final aim and that these can be proved by one or other rational procedure.

V

William Miller, in whose memory we are delivering these lectures, had a liking for Tennyson, and from him he took the verse which he made the motto of his living and teaching and which, later on, become the theme for the Miller Endowment Lectures. The verse reads:

"Yet I doubt not, through the ages an increasing purpose runs."

Miller used this quotation on the first page of his essay "The Causes which had Retarded the Progress of the Reformation." As the devoted expression of a poet's world-view or a religious person's firm belief in the absolute wisdom and goodness of the creator of the world, as a subjective documentation of one's feeling dependent on something absolute, this sentence has surely its undisputable meaning. But as critical thinkers we have to draw a careful distinction between what we may believe in and what we can prove on rational grounds. The main intention of these lectures was to mark this necessary distinction and to show that the question after the meaning, purpose and final aim of world-history as the history of mankind cannot satisfactorily be

answered by relying on the evidence of the senses and by rational discourse, and thus cannot be answered conclusively by finite beings such as we are.

This restriction of our knowledge does, of course, not mean that the question itself is meaningless. Being answerable or solvable, at least in principle, is not the criterion of a meaningful question. The meaning of asking for the meaning of history consists in its making obvious that the meaning of history is a problem which goes beyond the logical distinction between meaningful and meaningless, which lies outside the realm of all logical definition.

Therefore, and thus we conclude, if there is any meaning in history, and if this meaning cannot be proved in theory, then it should be proved in practice. From Plato to Heidegger it has never been seriously doubted that man is bound to live with others and that, while and through living with others, he becomes aware of and thus develops and actualizes his essential potentialities in some kind of a social community. These "others" pose the perpetual challenge to the individual to respond to them. In what way the individual responds to this challenge, whether treating the others as simple instruments or as persons, as pragmatic means or ends in themselves will reveal in what way and based on what grounds one renders the inquiry into the meaning of history meaningful in practical life, thus proving that, although this question cannot be answered theoretically, history need not necessarily be meaningless and absurd. "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent", says Wittgenstein at the end of his famous "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus". But speaking is surely not the only means of expressing our world experience, as silence is surely not the only answer to what cannot be expressed by words and terms.